

India. He spoke of the similarity of the views of both countries on several major international issues such as multipolarity and globalisation. He added that differences between the two countries were far outweighed by common ground.

Mekong-Ganga Swarna Bhumi Project

174. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether he has launched a six nation Mekong Ganga Swarna Bhumi Project during his visit to Laos; and
- (b) the aims of this project and the names of countries joining this project?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA): (a) and (b) The Vientiane Declaration on Mekong-Ganga Cooperation was signed in Vientiane, Lao PDR on 10 November, 2000 between the Governments of India, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. This initiative aims to promote cooperation among these six countries in the areas of Tourism, Culture, Education, Transport and Communication. Cooperation in the sectors identified under the Vientiane Declaration between the six countries stresses their civilisational affinity and expresses the revival, in the present day context, of an interactive vitality that has proven itself in the past, and can culturally and commercially energise the region.

Refugees from Afghanistan

175. SHRIMATI JAYAPRADA NAHATA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether about 30,000 Indians left Afghanistan due to the political upheaval;
- (b) if so, the action taken to help such refugees on their arrival in India; and

(c) the action taken to help the Indians still there to get visa for coming back to India?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA): (a) and (b) On account of continuing civil conflict in Afghanistan a large number of Afghan nationals including those of Indian origin are presently living in India. In keeping with our traditional policy of friendship towards the people of Afghanistan all Afghan nationals, including those of Indian origin, who came to India with valid travel documents/passports are being allowed to stay unhindered; they are being granted six monthly visa extensions.

(c) Visa applications for all Afghan nationals including those of Indian origin are being considered on a case by case basis.

Indonesian support to India for a seat in security council

176. DR. MANMOHAN SINGH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Indonesia has offered to support India's claim for membership of the UN Security Council; and

(b) what is Government's current assessment of the worldwide support of India in this matter?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA): (a) Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee visited Indonesia from 10th to 14th January, 2001. At the joint press conference, President Aburrahman Wahid expressed his personal support for India's candidature for permanent membership of the UN Security Council. But he added that he would have to discuss the issue with his cabinet before taking a formal view.

(b) There is a growing momentum in support of India's candidature for permanent membership of the UN Security Council. Many developed and developing countries have indicated support for India's candidature for permanent membership of the UN Security Council in the UN and/or bilaterally.